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# PHILANTHROPY AT JOHNSTOWN.

BY CLARA BARTON, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN NATIONAL

RED CROSS.

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THE DIFFICULTIES attendant upon relief work at the field—and I have no experience in any other—can scarcely surpass that of attempting to record them in any collected or intelligible manner. The work of relief committees for the alleviation of distress resulting from great disasters must necessarily be two-fold. One part is the raising of funds and preparing of material among the people at home, which admits of the most perfect and methodical system, and hence can be thoroughly learned and transmitted from call to call. But for those who go to the scene itself to learn the needs, and, to some extent, receive and apply the contributions sent, it is quite another affair. Perhaps one of the chief difficulties to be encountered in the administration of relief at the scenes of disaster or need lies in the variety which it must assume in order to meet the ever-changing features presented. One can only adapt measures and invent methods; yet it is to be remembered that the principle of adaptation amounts almost to a science, and can be studied.

Of the twelve fields\* on which the officers of the American Red Cross have operated since its organization in 1881, and borne a part more or less prominent, no two have been the same in general character, and only three or four in any manner similar. Yet it would probably be difficult to throw these people *hors du combat* in any field which they could reach; and much depends upon the ability to reach a field in time for greatest use. True, it is seldom that a body of victims are so completely cut off, not only from the help of the world, but from the world itself, as the fated resi-

\* Forest fires of Michigan, 1881; Mississippi floods, 1882; Ohio floods, 1883; Mississippi cyclone, 1883; Ohio flood, 1884; Mississippi flood, 1884; Virginia epidemic, 1885; Texas drought, 1887; Charleston earthquake, 1887; Mount Vernon cyclone, 1888; yellow fever in Florida, 1888; Conemaugh Valley floods, 1889.

dents of the Conemaugh Valley. The first despatches of Saturday were so wild in statement as to throw a doubt over their veracity. Sunday morning made it evident at Red Cross headquarters in Washington that the field must be reached if possible. The Potomac spread itself over Pennsylvania Avenue, and the Baltimore and Potomac station was reached only in boats. The Philadelphia auxiliary society was telegraphed to in the hope that it could find a way of reaching the ground direct. On Sunday evening we started for Baltimore, ordering all communications to be sent to Harrisburg, as probably the nearest point to be reached. The Pennsylvania Railroad was a sealed book, and so were our despatches and mails, two weeks elapsing before we got them, and we were from Sunday until Wednesday morning in going from Washington to Johnstown, and this by the first train.

The few houses left, being mainly upside down, were not habitable, and a place in a car was retained till a camp could be selected and tents unpacked and erected, which our resolute Philadelphians were not long in accomplishing. This was their first experience at the field, and although they were surgeons and physicians, equipped with all the fine instruments for surgery, I counted the blisters on their hands left by the shovels and axe-handles in pitching tents and digging trenches. The rain fell in continuous torrents. Access from the west had been more fortunate, and Pittsburg and Ohio were towers of strength to these bewildered wrecks of human beings. The town being under military control, it was, by nature of its international treaty, obligatory upon the Red Cross to report directly to the military officer in command. Headquarters were two miles from our camp; mountains of wreckage obstructed every pass way; the horses of the town were mostly lying dead along the banks. It remained only to make one's way in mud over boot-top and rain over head; but the cordial welcome of the gallant General Hastings, in command, and his genial neighbor, Axline, of Ohio, would have richly repaid a more difficult journey, if it had been possible to perform one. Other relief societies from the West were already arriving, and establishing quarters for work. Great depots of supplies were opened and filling up, and the crowds and lines of applicants swaying in front of the wide-open doors told a pitiful tale of want and woe. Here were arriving the supplies so systematically gathered and gloriously sent from the home relief, to whom their

indiscriminate outpouring would doubtless have seemed sacrilegious waste. In the first dreadful moments, this was scarcely to be avoided ; but the struggle comes in the herculean effort which must later be made to correct and discriminate in all this wholesale distribution.

It is probable that no other problem is so difficult to solve. No question has lain more heavily on the hearts and brains of good men ; for it has been mainly men who have had these matters in charge, and more than one, perplexed and discouraged in his unaccustomed rôle, has said to me, with a sad shake of the head : “ But this is work of which women should have charge ; we men are wasteful.” And as often as I have heard this, my own heart has been touched by the unskilled and patient efforts which these men were making to do this kind of woman’s work. Time and experience will later point a remedy for this state of things. Great advances have been made even in the last ten years.

No sooner was the terrible loss of life realized than the mother hearts turned to the little children. Every aid society in the land stirred its sleeping embers, and a perfect blaze of orphan-aid burst out over the entire country. All who could, sent deputations to gather up the orphans who were supposed to be wandering and crying in herds about the town. Others opened great places of refuge in city and country to receive them for either permanent or transient care, and every family that could arrange to take in a child wrote to some one on the spot to get one for them, to be sent by express or any safe conveyance to some point where it could be met ; often the color of the eyes designated, the disposition specified, and the point urged that it be of good family. It is safe to say that applications for several thousands of these little waifs have been received in the mails of the Red Cross alone, which was known not to be in any connection with this feature of the work. What must it have been for those who were ? and how difficult for them, as for us, to write continually to these good, tender-hearted people that there were no orphans in Johnstown—certainly not more than in ordinary times ; that the same foe that swept the parents in full strength did not spare the helpless children ! I have pitied the mistaken efforts of orphan-aid societies, for I knew that the noble representatives and workers they had sent here had blotted the pages with tears as day after day they wrote out the pitiful refrain :

“There are no orphans here ; the children are dead, *save* the few that have been carried through the waters of death by miracle, whose friends cannot give them up.”

Another mistake growing out of an illusion of a very similar nature has been that of the prevalence of sickness and wounds, and the consequent need of great numbers of physicians and nurses. The same argument applies here as to the children ; the weak ones could not outlast the fatigue and exposure of days and nights in the water, climbing and leaping from wreck to wreck, crushing and grinding between floating timbers, iron girders, and even driving engines plowing through the waters twenty feet beneath them. These went down from exhaustion, even if not wounded. Those who were hit and disabled found the second foe waiting. The water took them where the wounds left them, and between the two the end came ; and even if there might have been in some instances an escape from a place of security sought on floating wreckage, the fire crept in—the third foe—and the most terrible of all deaths ensued. Thus it became literally a “survival of the fittest.” The chronic invalids and the weak were mainly gone ; those remaining were the strong, healthy, and vigorous. The excitement and constant exertion for life prevented colds and harm from exposure, and the rates of illness of any kind resulting from the flood have been marvellously small.

The epidemics and typhoids which have really cast a shadow over the whole country have never existed here. Up to this time there may have been some cases with typhoid symptoms, but that would be possible in any place and under any circumstances. I should doubt if to-day there is, or at any time since the flood has been, any greater percentage of illness than would have been the case if no catastrophe had taken place. Some local physicians were lost and all were broken up in their practice, but the survivors are trying to get on their feet again. Volunteers from abroad are endeavoring to do the work gratuitously while there is no money to pay for medical attendance, and thus to hold the practice for the resident physicians when they shall be ready to take it. Even this has been misunderstood and sent out to the world as a great strife between the local and volunteer physicians. The truth is, they are excellent friends; no paying case of a local physician is touched by any volunteer, or in any way taken from his hands, and the Philadelphia surgeons, at least, have labored assiduously

to restore the instruments and medical outfit lost by the town physicians. The Red Cross physicians established several small hospital tents at first, and later they consolidated them in one good hospital, where excellent work is being done. They have had their difficulties and met them manfully, and, as young physicians, have learned some practical lessons in field work. The proffer of volunteer help from physicians and nurses so abundantly tendered has been most creditable to both as valuable classes of the community.

After all, it is, perhaps, the vast contributions of money and material around which the greater interest clusters, and in the dispensation of which the greater skill is required and the greater danger to be faced. To the worthy committees of Johnstown citizens who have been made the custodians of the vast sums contributed within the last five weeks for the relief of this valley too much manly and womanly sympathy cannot be extended. Many of them have seen their last dollar of earthly possessions swept from their grasp, and, side by side with the poor laborers whom they once employed, have dug day and night among the wrecks for some trace of the wife, son, or daughter, or all three, whom they believed to be crushed and buried beneath the ruins, and would fain take to a more fitting sepulchre. What absurdity to doubt that these men have the best good of their stricken neighbors at heart ! What cruelty to suspect them ! And yet before they are through with their task, their ears will hear these criticisms, and their weary souls will many times yearn for the peaceful rest that has come to their loved and lost.

It is always thus. I have never known it fail, and it comes to me over and over to doubt the wisdom and humanity of making the citizens of an afflicted town the custodians of the means contributed towards relief and restitution; to question whether it were not more kind and humane, and equally just, to place all this duty in the hands of a competent committee of strangers who are not to reside among the people; who, being perfectly disinterested, cannot be harmed by complaints and accusations. Indeed, would not the complaints be fewer, and the satisfaction more general, if these leading citizens, so needed among the people, should be left to them in good faith and confidence, to lead and advise them as they have been wont to do ? But as is generally the case, the citizens who serve on the committee are forever lost to the

people through the scandal and distrust which the greed of the ignorant populace brings upon them. Of the little dissensions and jealousies, State, city, town, and otherwise, mainly growing out of ambition and what in women would be vanity, I have nothing to say, but much to hope for, when it all shall have worked itself clear and settled down to good steady purpose. These committees find difficulties enough which require no pointing-out in order to be seen. Coming nearer home, our own work pictures itself in bright relief to my gaze as having met few difficulties, thus far, which hard work, patience, and the exercise of the best judgment possessed could not overcome.

As previously mentioned, the Red Cross here has consisted of a two-fold force—a portion of the National Association from its headquarters at Washington, with valuable acquisitions in the persons of its members drawn from over the United States. Of these we have called nearly a score for the sake of their aid and counsel. The second force, consisting of the Branch Society of the Red Cross of Philadelphia, has brought to its aid some forty or more persons, mainly physicians and nurses, and has held a valuable commissary department, distributing largely. It would be gratifying to mention by name some of the ladies and gentlemen whose volunteer service the labors of these few weeks have called to our aid, and of whom it might literally be said that it was a liberal education to know them. One whose privilege it is to preside over assistants like these is humbled to the dust by praise tendered for effort or success : with such lieutenants as gather to the national standard of the Red Cross, what captain could fail ?

But there were some perplexities, not to say trials, as, for instance, before one had a dry corner of a box on which to transact business the mails commenced to bring in a hundred letters and telegrams per day, containing checks, drafts, money-orders, postal notes, orders to draw, and money by the United States Express, American Express, and Adams Express. The banks had all gone down stream, the safes were in the bottom of the Conemaugh, half the business men dead, our desk a dry-goods box turned sidewise, our combination-lock the tangled strings that drew together the sides of a flyless tent flapping and swaying in the wind. The Western Union was so overcrowded that despatches were often twenty-four hours late. But if thanks went for anything, if words were of any avail, what would one try to say of the tire-

less courtesy of its worn-down clerks? Sleepless, vigilant, weary, and faint, they toiled on, stimulated, one knows, by the great-hearted, generous example above them, which bids them ever, in the name of humanity, to count all loss as gain, so the afflicted are comforted and the needy find a friend. The consolation and safeguard was that steady-browed stenographer with her hundred and seventy words a minute.

Checks were not immediately available, but express funds came to the rescue; and before even a tent was prepared the material commenced to arrive from every source—boxes, barrels, trunks, baskets, bundles, car-loads. Letters upon letters told that such and such boxes had been sent, special distribution desired in special ways, and “Please acknowledge as soon as received.” Every station and express office were thronged with similar freight—perhaps thousands of packages every day—and a dozen commissaries were open, with thrifty agents and active drivers claiming their goods immediately for distribution. The teams drove up with a score or more of ponderous boxes and barrels all marked to the President of the Red Cross, at Johnstown, Pennsylvania; but from nowhere, if one shall except Philadelphia, with the distinctive regulation sign which would have insured safety. Then commenced the search to find who had sent all this. Often not a modest word, not even a pencil-mark, or a mere pencil-mark, if anything, and no intimation of what it contained. How shall it be “acknowledged as soon as received”? You want immediately some sheets and bedding for some one who waits, and you commence on one of these boxes. After the labor of a man is expended, and five minutes consumed, you discover that the box contains dresses and shoes. Attack another—men’s clothing; another—sundries, dried fruit, pickles; another—canned goods, condensed milk, rice, and ground coffee, the two latter broken open and sifted through. The weary, waiting woman is tired, and so are you, and you give up the search, call off your men, and resolve to tell all givers in the land before you sleep to place their address plainly, and a schedule of contents, on the outside of every package of relief goods ever sent.

Soon the anxious letters commence to arrive asking if “our boxes are received.” You presume they are, but are not quite certain by whom. Every agent or employee indignantly affirms that he “never took anything with a red cross on it to his head-



quarters"; and so one believes. These are difficulties which, if not quite surmountable, have at least been borne, and will lessen in time. This necessary display of opening all boxes at once, whether needed at the moment or not, gave to youthful and unaccustomed eyes, more likely to look among storehouses and headquarters than the crowded haunts of the people in the mud and on the ground, the impression of far more material than was actually here; and forgetting the appalling fact that twenty thousand people were to be supplied over and over with every necessary of life, they were misled, formed hasty and damaging conclusions, and before two weeks had passed the reports went out to all the country that there was nothing more needed at Johnstown—they could not use what they already had in two years, and no more should be sent. Poor, dazed, speechless, uncomplaining, homeless, frightened, and bereft! weary mourners digging in the river banks, watching in the morgues! poor Johnstown! poor fifty miles of Conemaugh! Who has named your spokesman? who has appointed your guardians? Then doubled the letters on our desks. "Is it true, what we read? Can all be supplied so soon? Must we hold our goods or money? Can you make no use of them or us in all that region? Tell us at once, we beg of you." Then came need for two stenographers, that one be not worn out; and here they are day and night; and here is a woman's brain, busy with houses, lots, workmen, workwomen, trains, lumber, and applicants of all descriptions, dictating in hurried snatches this crude, disconnected article, which must be left where and as it is, to the mercy of the magnanimous and forgiving; for the work is at its height and cannot be told until accomplished.

For an impression of the interesting personality of this individual, the readers must be referred to the illustrations so profusely placed before them in the great journals of the day—namely, a chubby face and form, curly hair, fixed smile beaming with *un*intelligence, affecting a nurse's cap, neatly-folded kerchief, regulation dress, and benignly bearing a teacup. Alas! I am dreadfully afraid she does not always wear that becoming smile; is too hard worked and hard thought for a plump, chubby face and figure; that the regulation suit and nurse's cap would suffer in two-weeks' rain and mud; and as for the teacup—

CLARA BARTON.